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# Wittgenstein and the Theatre of Confession

For my “young judge” Światopełek

**Abstract:** In this article we perform a juxtaposition of Wittgenstein’s confession with the art of drama. Our aim is to transpose the private language argument criticizing the ostensive definition of internal objects (beetle in a box thought experiment) onto confession and the art of drama performance. The play (possibly called “game”) of the actor is not an expression of his soul interior, but an autonomous necessity in the most decisive meaning – which means: the only thing to be done. Correspondingly, confession doesn’t express any interior misery – it is an acting (the double sense of this word will be further developed), the only possible acting within these conditions, the only possible response to one’s condition – a condition of mutilation where human misery appears very distinctly. Confession creates neither a relation of power (as Foucault was demonstrating in his late writings) nor a form of emotional exhibitionism but a language game consisting on words judging oneself, immune to interpretation, explanation, and vanity coming from their expression. Irreplaceable words become the agent of salvation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article is the effect of great encounters that helped me – a non-Wittgensteinian – to “see” Wittgenstein perhaps more than understand his philosophy. I should first address many thanks to Dr. Ilse Somavilla who welcomed me on the beautiful roof of the Brenner Archives in Innsbruck together with its director Prof. Ulrike Tanzer (Thank you!). It is through Ilse Somavilla’s writings and archive editing work that I could engage myself and follow her on a path of reading Wittgenstein with a sensibility for religion and art.

I owe also a lot of thankfulness to Prof. Alois Pichler for long lasting, repeated hospitality in the Wittgenstein Archives at the Bergen University and great patience for my plans of developing research plans about Wittgenstein in the Polish Galicia. The ability to visit these two places, Norway and Austria, have left inside myself a Wittgensteinian imagery that creates the scenography of my philosophical attempt inside this article. My research would not be possible without receiving the scholarship of the Republic of Austria OEAD for which I also express my deep gratitude.

I am also very grateful to Kasia Mala for her linguistic revision of my article.

And finally, what triggered this Winn-gensteinian performance were unforgettable dinners with Maja, my Mother Agata, and my son Światopełek – to say they were inspiring is not enough...

Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say  
to him: "Forgive all our sins and receive us  
graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our  
lips."

Hosea 14, 2

## 1 Culture

Writers, poets, filmmakers fascinated by the figure of Wittgenstein were sincere enough to admit they do not really grasp Wittgenstein's philosophy but are enchanted by his personality – the mythical personality constituted by selected pictures from his biography, his friends' memoirs, scattered remarks. Wittgenstein is a philosopher of culture not because he has attempted any cultural analysis, nor because his remarks on language have sneaked into the language of cultural disputes, but due to his cultural education in one of the last artistic milieu of the highest quality. Educated in this entourage he has acquired a sensibility for words not only logical but also aesthetical so that every phrase he pronounced was turning into a captivating image and every sentence was full of vibrant dramaturgy. This imagery that surrounds Wittgenstein is double dealing, it can easily turn a philosopher into an idol copied in thousands reproductions by a popularizing culture that no longer understands the language of philosophy, but it can also be the basis of an iconic relation with the appearing images, in which culture could enter into dialogue with this thin layer of *argumentum ex silentio* that Wittgenstein cared so much about. G. W. Sebald, one of a number of artists (Thomas Bernhard, Samuel Beckett among others) who concealed Wittgenstein under the costume of a literary character, said:

[...] Wittgenstein constantly accompanies me / not that I understand his philosophy – which almost no one understands – but because the story of his personality was developing in such a way with all pathological aspects is infinitely fascinating for me. I cannot be saturated with watching his photography. (Sebald 2015: 28.08.2015)

This line of understanding Wittgenstein can certainly be misleading. I would risk to say that what remits such a reductive approach in terms of philosophy is only art itself – the making of a work of art. This issue has fascinated Wittgenstein both in a metaphysical and a physical aspect. The metaphysical aspect can be discerned from Wittgenstein's dialogue within two intertwined milieux, the one he met in 1916 in Olomouc, readers of Karl Krauss, especially Paul Engelmann, together with whom he has build his sister's house in Vienna; and the sec-

ond group that can be discerned around Ludwig von Ficker and his periodic “The Brenner”. Two well-known and largely interpreted exchanges can serve as examples: the first comes from Wittgenstein’s struggle to publish the *Tractatus*, through the most apophatic abstract in philosophy coming from the letter to Ludwig von Ficker:

I wanted to write that my work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I have not written. And precisely this second part is the important one. For the Ethical is delimited only from within, as it were, by my book; and I’m convinced that, strictly speaking, it can ONLY be delimited in this way. In brief, I think: All of that which *many* are *babbling* today, I have defined in my book by remaining silent about it.” (CLF 1969: 35)

The second appearing in the correspondence with P. Engelmann about Uhland’s poem “Count Eberhard’s Hawthorn”: “[...] and this is how it is: if only you do not try to utter [auszusprechen] what is unutterable [Unaussprechliche], then nothing gets lost. But the unutterable will be – unutterably – contained in what has been uttered!” (CPE 1970: 62).

Playing around what can be said and what cannot is a feature that links Wittgenstein’s philosophy and poetry. While on the other side a desire for creating physically, producing a physical object was also tormenting the philosopher’s soul as it is shown by his first fascination with machines, his interest in observing women sewing rather than philosophizing, his care for objects, from architecture of buildings to the smallest elements of daily life. Equally an envy of Leibniz, or Spinoza (see MDC 1981: 120) could be discerned because their philosophy was worked out in ateliers requiring sophisticated handcraft.

## 2 Confession

Wittgenstein’s laboratory or atelier where some kind of craft has been exercised appeared clearly in Norway during his stay at Skjolden in 1936. Simple life, or rather these conditions of life that required continuous physical effort, starting from rowing to the closest village, up to making fire in an isolated hut under very poor weather conditions, these were elements through which Wittgenstein was preparing a “decent” philosophy. But there was also another “laboratory” in which the efforts were not least significant. It is not surprising that *The Brown Book* that he was intending to revise during his Norwegian stay begins with Saint Augustine’s description of learning language (kept as § 1 of *Philosophical Investigations*), as Ray Monk has already observed, it is the religious autobiographical part of Saint Augustine that provided him this introductory position since “for Wittgenstein, *all* philosophy, in so far as it is pursued honestly and de-

cently, begins with a confession. [...] What gets in the way of genuine understanding is often not one's lack of intelligence, but the presence of one's pride" (Monk 1991: 855). Skjolden in 1936 was for Wittgenstein a laboratory meant to prepare a whole life confession.

Here again many remarks and personal memories have turned "Wittgenstein's confession" into a figure inspiring both philosophers and artists. The chosen confidants of this act of avowal have left evocative descriptions of what happened when Wittgenstein forced them to assume this role. "[I]t put me into a temper to be told firmly, when I asked whether it was urgent (I believe one of the children was not well), that it was urgent and could not wait" (Pascal 1981: 48). The descriptions offer more than enough for a *mise en scène*. Fania Pascal continues her didascalia: "a mental attitude appear in the memory bearing physical attributes – I could swear to it now that he kept his mackintosh on throughout, buttoned up, sitting up very straight and forbiddingly" (Pascal 1981: 48). The event in its peculiarity seemed to force the confidants to give an account (Pascal 1981: 50); that impulse could be an extension of Wittgenstein's own untypical (not to say irrational) urge expressed among others in these words addressed to Ludwig Hänsel – "for now I must write [the confession] to the others, for know it they must" (CLH 2003: 285, Wittgenstein's emphasis). This drive for confessing was transmitted to the listeners who, at first, generally were reluctant: "If ever a thing could wait", I thought facing him across the table, "it is a confession of this kind and made in this manner" (Pascal 1981: 48). Such antagonistic reaction of Fania Pascal was not unique, Ludwig Hänsel answered in a letter from the 15<sup>th</sup> of November 1936: "But to make the content of the letter known now, to read it to others, to send it around, this you must not demand from me. Don't be angry at my refusal!" (CLH 2003: 286). Maurice O'Drury who kept the content of the confession secret relates to Moore's –another addressee of the confession – unwilling reaction:

When [Wittgenstein] returned from Norway he told me that he had done no writing there but had spent his time in prayer. He had felt it necessary to write out a confession of those things in his past life of which he was most ashamed. He insisted on me reading this. He had already shewn it to Moore, and he said that Moore had seemed very distressed that he had had to read it (MDC 1981: 135).

The last two "Englishmen", expectedly, could not authorize themselves to "come out with a matter told [them] in confidence" (Pascal 1981: 48). Many others simply refused to read the letter (...) especially if it hasn't been addressed to them personally (as it was the case with Paul Wittgenstein). Nevertheless, the range of addressees was as vast as the expression used in the letter to Hänsel – Wittgenstein's "family and friends". It is only speculation but it seems that the narratives

we have about this confession would not be so numerous and alike if the content were not so minor from the ethical point of view. This inadequacy between the non-significance of the iniquities with the frame-scene of confession was well described by Fania Pascal: “At one stage I cried out: “What is it? You want to be perfect?” And he pulled himself up proudly, saying: “Of course I want to be perfect”. This memory alone would make me burst with the wish to describe the scene” (Pascal 1981: 50).

The majority of answers to Wittgenstein consisted in a reference to one’s sinfulness, trying uselessly to console Wittgenstein by a general (far too general for Wittgenstein) “confiteor” (“to each of the sins you confessed I could juxtapose my own, or far worse ones of the same kind” (CF 1996: no. 123, 154). But Wittgenstein “did not ask for an emotional response. His manner forbade it” (Pascal 1981: 49), he expected nor consolation, nor empathy. He was entering on this scene alone, overcoming fear and facing his main enemy – pride.

Although we are able to understand why philosophy required this preliminary spiritual exercise of confession, we are nevertheless confused with the presence of a third party in this intimate relation of the soul with itself or at most with God. Together with members of Wittgenstein’s family and his friends we feel exposed to this final act of a spiritual struggle (and I intentionally refrain from using the term “religious” since Wittgenstein was very consciously choosing the term “Geständnis” rather than “Beichte” referring to his act). In order to develop the philosophical sense of this exposition of one’s own sinfulness we need to leave aside the natural tendency to separate biographical claims from philosophical one’s, envisaging the famous link of “logic and sin” from the exceptional angle of the *expressed* confession. The confession content won’t be the object of our reflection, no more than the sense of guilt, but the sole presence of sins *pronounced and heard* –which means the coming out of an urge to inform the others about one’s own wretchedness prepared through prayers and loneliness. Some of the confessional letters are explicitly meant to be an introduction to further face-to-face confessions after Wittgenstein’s return from Norway. This was the case with the plea addressed to Ludwig Hänsel asked to make known the written confession “to his wife & children, to Wittgenstein’s siblings & their children, to Drobil & other Wittgenstein’s friends & Mrs. Sjögren [...] that is, that you let them read it”, wrote Wittgenstein. Hänsel protested “I don’t have the strength for it!” (CLH 2003: 285) Finally, convinced he decided to send the confession to Wittgenstein’s sisters. According to Arvid Sjögren a letter of confession addressed directly to the family has been exhibited in the family Wittgenstein’s house for whoever wanted to read it (CF 1996: no. 215, 154). The reading room of the family Wittgenstein residence became the scene of a theatre.

### 3 Theatre

Let's imagine a theatre, the curtain goes up & and we see someone alone in his room walking up and down, lighting a cigarette, seating himself etc. so that suddenly we are observing a human being from outside in a way that ordinarily we can never observe ourselves; as if we were watching a chapter from a biography with our own eyes, – surely this would be at once uncanny and wonderful. More wonderful than anything that a playwright could cause to be acted or spoken on the stage. We should be seeing life itself. – But then we do see this every day & it makes not the slightest impression on us! True enough, but we do not see it from that point of view. (VB 1980: 6e)

This remark followed an exchange with Paul Engelmann who noticed that when he found his own manuscripts in a drawer he estimated them as being “glorious [and] worth presenting to other people” until imagining them published, thenceforth, they were losing all this “charm and value”. Wittgenstein who enjoyed the example very much developed the description:

[Engelmann] is seeing his life as God's work of art, & as such it is certainly worth contemplating [...] But only the artist can represent the individual thing so that it appears to us a work of art; those manuscripts *rightly* lose their value if we contemplate them singly & in any case without *prejudice*, i.e. without being enthusiastic about them in advance. (VB 1980: 6e-7e)

When the curtain goes up and the scene is enlightened by the stream of a “right perspective”, becoming “a work of art” or “God's work of art” within the light of “enthusiasm”, something bare becomes something special. Though the enthusiasm is termed a “*prejudice*”, and as a prejudice it is “*rightly*” (Wittgenstein's emphasis) subject to devaluation. But while observing language in use, looking at the stage instead of thinking (“don't think, but look!” [PI 1958: § 66]) Wittgenstein tried to sustain as far as possible this flash in which a remarkable equation appears between the right perspective, the prejudice, enthusiasm and art. This equivalence referring to the first part of our essay should now be juxtaposed to confession. Wittgenstein's envy for art consisted in its ability for such an exposition of one's experiences of life that preserves the experience of exaltation by the artist and conveys it to the audience.

(I am always reminded [– continues Wittgenstein –] of one of those insipid photographs of a piece of scenery which is interesting to the person who took it because he was there himself, experienced something, but which a third party looks at with justifiable coldness; insofar as it is ever justifiable to look at something with coldness) (VB 1980: 7e)

This ending remark from the commentary to Engelmann's experience is crucial and supplements our equation with the opposition of cold and warm points of view. On the one hand, the cold, general and rightly devaluating perspective is reasonable, but its justice or – let's say – righteousness is explicitly questioned. In an experience of everyday life, when admiring one's own piece of work or piece of nature we can receive it as a wonder, a miracle or a value, but when sharing our experience we meet the problem of expression. According to the *Tractatus*, we are unable to express nor aesthetic, nor ethic, nor religious values, still, Wittgenstein is not willing to choose the *via negativa*– “the inexpressible would be [nevertheless] inexpressibly present in an act of expression”. The *presence inside the act of expression* when sharing our feeling of miraculousness is something that Wittgenstein pursues and we should be careful in comprehending its nature.

The theatrical framework of the studied perspective/prejudice/warm point of view entails the reminiscence of one of Wittgenstein's theatrical episode of attending a performance by Ludwig Anzengruber's *Die Kreuzelscheiber* in Vienna and the assertion that has been pronounced by one of the characters: “Nothing bad can happen to me”. According to Norman Malcolm's narrative this expression made Wittgenstein think “for the first time” about the possibility of religion. Even though this supposition might be exaggerated (as Wittgenstein was surely reflecting about religion well before this event), truth is that this episode appears in the *Lecture on Ethics* as an example of a nonsensical – yet must-be-expressed – statement. It is pronounced under the necessity of living an experience of absolute safety, a sensation which was according to Wittgenstein consonant with the feeling of being “safe in the hands of God” (LE 1965: 10; Monk 1991). Although the theatre drama was “mediocre” (Monk 1991) some inexpressible feeling has been wrapped in a line, pronounced and heard by one particular participant of the audience. And Wittgenstein never forgot the expression of this feeling: an expression that could be lucidly perceived as an absurd, but expressed within this theatrical framework had so much strength that it could render religion possible. If one had pronounced this nonsense in such a way, only religion (i.e. God the Savior) could condition its meaningfulness.

If ever Wittgenstein's confession could be treated within such a theatrical perspective a necessary redefinition of entering into a role-performance should be undertaken.

What I perform so to speak [...] on stage in my soul doesn't render its condition more beautiful but (rather) more despicable. And yet again and again I take myself to be beautifying this condition through a beautiful scene on the stage. For I am sitting in the auditorium

rather than viewing everything from the outside. For I don't like standing on the sober, ordinary, unfriendly street but like sitting in the warm, pleasant, auditorium.

Yes, only for a few moments I step out into the open & perhaps even then only with the feeling of being able to slip back into the warmth at any time. (DB 2003: 111)

In this fragment we come again upon the warm perspective of the theatre-audience among which Wittgenstein is also eager to sit, albeit the performance and Wittgenstein himself in the role of the *metteur en scène* contribute to a more shameful appearance of his own drama. The reasons of the philosopher's decision to put a mask on his face should not be interpreted straightforwardly as distancing, on the contrary, Wittgenstein like Descartes advances masked (*"larvatus prodeo"*) onto the stage *in his very own name*. Descartes justified wearing a mask (*"like actors who do not want to show the redness of their faces"*) by intending to see the reaction of the public to his un/dis-covered *"ego cogito"*<sup>2</sup>. Why did Wittgenstein follow this gesture by wearing the mask of the worst iniquities?<sup>3</sup> Like Descartes he felt the necessity to explain the presence of art as domain of pretense:

When I am thinking of my confession, I understand the expression. "... & had not love etc." For, even this confession would be of no use to me if it were made as it were like an *artful ethical trick*. But I don't want to say that I refrained from it because the mere trick was not enough for me: I am too cowardly for it.

(An artful ethical trick is something that I perform for others, or also for me (myself), in order to show what I can do) (DB 2003: 133, my emphasis U.I.-S.)

"Had not love" is obviously a reference to the *Letters to the Corinthians*, 13:1–3: "If I speak with the eloquence of men and of angels, but *have no love*, I become no more than blaring brass or crashing cymbal". Talking about speech as art of eloquence Saint Paul adopts a derogatory attitude. The artfulness of the ethical trick, speaking in Wittgensteinian terms, has also to do with eloquence. Wittgenstein seemed to be disputing his own mastery of words when preparing his con-

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2 "Ut comoedi, moniti ne in fronte appareat pudor, personam induunt : sic ego, hoc mundi theatrum consensurus, in quo hactenus spectator exsiti, larvatus prodeo" ("Like comedians wear masks to cover the shyness on the faces, me too, when coming up on the stage of the world theatre where up to now I have only been a spectator, I am advancing masked"). (Descartes 1908: 213)

3 See LUS 2004, where in a fragment found by Ilse Somavilla in Rudolf Köder's legacy Wittgenstein describes a dream inside which his was making him compliments about his intellectual superiority and following his strong counter-reaction of penitence – praying and admitting his wretchedness (*"total nullity"*) in the eyes of God.



fessions, both written and oral. Between his own conscience to be examined and the fact of formulating statements of facts, vanity was sneaking in.

Everything or nearly everything I do, these entries included, is tinted by vanity & the best I can do is as it were to separate, to isolate the vanity & do what's right in spite of it, even though it is always watching. I cannot chase her away/ only sometimes it is not present (DB 2003: 23).

Observing his wretchedness Wittgenstein could easily fall into the pride coming from the heroism of his confession, or the brightness of his intimate soul examination. The passage was very narrow. The spiritual exercise that Wittgenstein was devoting himself to in order to “isolate vanity” required the presence of others, although this same presence was generating further dangers. Vanity is also relational – we are proud of our truthfulness, but on the other hand, our wretched nature can make us forfeit someone else's love. This was what Wittgenstein truly feared the most.

What we notice here is an ethical mirror of logic, in which vanity acts in the role of any value that appears in an illegitimate way inside assertions about facts. When Wittgenstein isolates vanity from his most intimate remarks, he tries to clear language, the same way he did at the beginning of his philosophical career.

## 4 Winn-genstein

The metaphor of the theatre stage as the place where the taking apart from vanity is performed requires that we inverse the ordinary way of attributing traits of sincerity and pretense in art. Sincerity doesn't necessarily proceed through an unmasking; on the contrary, it is by wearing the mask of the worst iniquities that Wittgenstein comes out. As it has been the case with Descartes the mask can be an instrument of sincerity – of the philosopher's readiness to speak in his own name (see Badiou 2011<sup>4</sup>). From behind a mask of guilt Wittgenstein ap-

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4 “The antiphilosopher thus necessarily speaks in his proper name, and he must show this ‘proper’ as real proof of his saying. In effect, there is no validation and no compensation for his act except immanent to this act itself, since he denies that this act can ever be justified in the order of theory. It is moreover in such a way that Wittgenstein conceives of any true act: ‘There must indeed be some kind of ethical reward and ethical punishment, but they must reside in the action itself’ (6.422) The biographical impulse, the taste for confession, and even in the end a highly recognizable infatuation that commands the ‘writerly’ style of all antiphilosophers (if you go back to the list, there is not a single one who is not a master of language): these

pears on stage in order to see the reaction of his loved ones. Acceptance, forgiveness, empathy are all together inaccurate reactions to this performance. What is expected is only love. Love conditions the truthfulness without vanity of the performed confession; similarly as the performance of *Die Kreuzelscheiber* (through Wittgenstein's reception) was conditioning a religious feeling of safety and thus religion itself. Consequently, love becomes the condition of being or not being – according to this remark inside which it is covertly present:

...to be deprived of the affection of others would be altogether impossible for me because in this sense I have far too little (or no) self. Perhaps I have a self only insofar as I feel actually reprobate.

And when I say that I feel reprobate, this is no expression (or just hardly ever an expression) of this feeling (DB 2003: 113)

Therefore Wittgenstein's self disappears both without the affection of others and without a sense of guilt. The two seem to create a dramaturgical tension around the self. And this relationship is caught only in actuality, which means that the self hasn't got the ability to endure, but vanishes together with the vanishing of the feeling.

But how to understand that "to feel actually reprobate" is *not* an expression of feeling? It seems that it is here that we need the framework of the theatre stage.

WINNIE: Hail, holy light. [Long pause. She closes her eyes. Bell rings loudly. She opens eyes at once. Bell stops. She gazes front. Long smile. Smile off. Long pause.] Someone is looking at me still. [Pause.] Eyes on my eyes. [Pause.] What is that unforgettable line? [Pause. Eyes right.] Willie. [Pause. Louder.] Willie. [Pause. Eyes front.] May one still speak of time? [Pause.] Say it is a long time now, Willie, since I saw you. [Pause.] Since I heard you. [Pause.] May one? [Pause.] I used to think...[Pause]...I say I used to think that I would learn to talk alone. [Pause] By that I mean to myself, the wilderness. [Smile.] But no. [Smile broader.] No no. [Smile off.] Ergo you are there. [Pause.] Oh no doubt you are dead like the others, no doubt you have died, or gone away and left me, like the others, it doesn't matter you are there, the same as ever, I can see it. (Beckett 2012b: n.p.)

This beginning of the second act of Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days* offers us the adequate dramaturgy for understanding the non-expressionist character of Wittgenstein's confession. Winnie, the female character, embedded up to the neck begins her day having at her disposal only words to be pronounced, song to

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are the necessary consequences of the most intimate antiphilosophical certainty, the one that consists, against millennia of philosophy, in the duty to announce and practice an active salvific break in one's own name only." (Badiou 2011: 88).

be sung (–“not too early”), prayers to be prayed. Her companion Willie is no longer within her purview, perhaps gone away, perhaps dead “like the others”. Nevertheless Winnie’s logical inference implies that Willie is listening to her. Because she is not disposed to speak to the wall, which means that her words cannot be vain and require if not a response, at least a listener.

Mutilate a human being all the way, cut off his arms & legs nose & ears & then see what remains of his self-respect & of his dignity & to what extent his concepts of such things still remain the same. We have no idea how these concepts depend on the ordinary, normal, condition of our body. What becomes of them when we are led by a leash with a ring through our tongues & tied up? How much of a human being then remains in him? Into what sort of state does such a human being sink? We don’t know that we are on a high and narrow rock & around us chasms in which everything looks completely different. (DB 2003: 147–149)

Beckett appeals to perform on stage exactly this kind of “mutilation” that Wittgenstein describes. Winnie is sinking into the sands that are slowly enclosing her body. From the beginning she seems to have nothing left, only a bag with several objects and a few stories that ritualize her day. This paucity requires a rigorous economy of time – both from Winnie, from the actress playing her role and from the audience. “Nothing happens”, as usual in Beckett’s plays, but Winnie is nonetheless surprising us: there is no dense atmosphere of existential emptiness in the horizon of the coming end. Winnie seems to save herself from the fate of many other Beckett’s characters. Her economy works perfectly, her language game reassures, perhaps she even “win(s)”, according to her fiancée Willie’s last word being probably the effect of an interrupted calling of her name.

This analogy between Winnie and the confessing Wittgenstein would not appear to us without the performance of this role of a great actress of Polish theatre and film Maja Komorowska. Her Winnie, her *mise-en-scène*<sup>5</sup> attests to the specificity of words pronounced from the stage, contrary to those read by an interpreter. Speaking about the actress’s performance without mentioning the theatre director seems legitimate in this case, because Beckett gives a dense script similar to a music score<sup>6</sup>, intended to describe every gesture of hands and face appearances without leaving space between his text and the actor; it is the actor, who is the true “*metteur en scène*”. It is the actress who places (fr. *mettre*) the character

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5 The play “*Szczęśliwe dni* (The Happy Days)” directed by Antoni Libera in the Warsaw theatre Teatr Dramatyczny (première in 1995), cast: Maja Komorowska (Winnie), Adam Ferency (Willie).

6 I refer here to Tadeusz Kantor’s use of the term “*partytura*” (german *Partitur*) meaning music score instead of script for his theatre plays. Linking the role of the director with the music conductor Kantor was present at every performance of his plays.

on the stage, lending to Winnie her own body. And Maja Komorowska performs this sacrifice without remainder. “Winnie doesn’t give time to catch my breath”, avows Komorowska in a book interview with Tadeusz Sobolewski (Komorowska & Sobolewski 2014: 24).

The bag is there Willie as good as ever, the one you gave me that day ... to go to market. [Pause. Eyes front] That day. [Pause] What day? [Pause.] I used to pray. [Pause] Yes, I must confess I did. [Smile.] Not now. [Smile broader] No no. [Smile off. Pause] Then... now... what difficulties here, for the mind. [Pause] To have been always what I am – and so changed from what I was. [Pause] I am the one, I say the one, then the other. [Pause] There is so little one can say, one says it all [Pause.] All one can. [Pause] [...] Ah well, not to know, not to know for sure, great mercy, all I ask. [Pause]. (Beckett 2012b)

The actress produces the subsequent lines of the score instant after instant, nothing stored up, as she says, with a special “tact” towards the pronounced words even when, after pronouncing them, she discovers “they are all empty”. But sometimes “[w]ords fail, there are times when even they fail” – when listening to this clause we are succumbed to ask the question that appeared to Winnie a couple of lines before, when she was speaking about her hair: “I shall simply brush and comb them later on, purely and simply, I have the whole. – [Pause. Puzzled.] Them? [Pause]. Or it? [Pause.] “Brush and comb it? [...] What would you say, Willie, speaking of your hair, them or it?” (Beckett 2012b)

Thanks to Winnie words receive individuality, engaging a quasi-personalism of language close to Wittgenstein’s remark “words are deeds” (VB 1980: 53e). Inside this wilderness where Winnie has been entombment (like Antigone at the beginning of the art of drama), words seem to free and alienate themselves from her voice resounding in the echoing space of the theatre. Winnie pronounces them but also, and perhaps furthestmost, she is listening to “them” when they are coming back to her. She would perhaps prefer to hear someone else, that is why she creates a small puppet theatre with Mildred and a doll with “china blue eyes that open and shut”, or an imagined pair of last humans who got lost around – figures which reminds of others Beckett’s characters, with their bags in hands, vanishing on the horizon. Winnie amuses us with those repeated stories like she amuses herself to fill the emptiness of the day. A Chinese box structure appears inside the narrative. Perhaps in that case we should inquire Winnie with the same questions that she poses to her characters. But “whoever asks a person in a play what he’s experiencing when he’s speaking?” (LW 1982: 7e), interrogates rhetorically Wittgenstein. A stage entity should not be asked about her private mental state. Meaning appears through words that are framed by a specific theatrical atmosphere. While sitting in the auditorium we are *inside* the “beetle box”, even in a Chinese box structure of the drama we should not

seek for a different one. We are clutched inside like children who agree for a play of imagination and get involved in the story with all their heart (*"This is only his box. The sheep you asked for is inside.* I was very surprised to see a light break over the face of my young judge: 'That is exactly the way I wanted it! Do you think that this sheep will have to have a great deal of grass?'"[Saint-Exupéry 2004: 8]).

When I am gripped by a tragedy (in the cinema, for example). I always tell myself: no, I won't do it like that! Or: no, it shouldn't be like that I want to console the hero & everyone [...] that's why I only understand the happy end (in the primitive sense). The downfall of the hero I don't understand – I mean, with the heart. So what I really always want is to hear a fairy tale. (DB 2003: 97)

"Understanding with the heart" means that we *want* a happy ending – the will precedes the facts. You don't *accept* the downfall of the hero even if you are able to understand its reasons. It's *just* a play, *just* a stage entity. Don't think, don't explain<sup>7</sup>, don't build new myths, don't be a philosopher, don't interpret – *just* look. But within this "just" the actress is being consumed. Winnie in her seemingly "light" role consumes the actress more than any heavily dramatic role of Ibsenian type<sup>8</sup>. The protophenomenon observed on scene should be denuded from metaphysics, from unconscious, from any sort of overbuilt interpretation. In its nudity it will be sufficiently striking or, more precisely, only this bareness will be striking enough to produce an understanding with the heart.

Nevertheless "defactoism" (Fogelin 2009) or "critical description" (Cavell 1976) can be misleading if we underestimate the value of this "just"<sup>9</sup>. Therefore we need to delineate carefully the difference between this "just" and a politics of bare facts, a difference from a vulgar showing off on stage, from simple phenomenology. According to what we have established in the first part of this essay we notice the advantage of the artist over the philosopher in observing this differ-

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7 see *Philosophical Investigations* § 654: "Our mistake is to look for an explanation where we ought to look at what happens as a 'proto-phenomenon.' That is, where we ought to have said: *this language-game is played [Dieses Sprachspiel wird gespielt].*" (PI 1958: § 654)

8 According to Furlani when the actress Jessica Tandy wanted to clarify her role for *Not I* Beckett wrote to the director; "I no more know where she is or why thus than she does. All I know is in the text. 'She' is purely a stage entity, part of a stage image and purveyor of a stage text. The rest is Ibsen." (Furlani 2012: 51)

9 Furlani relates also: "The actor Horst Bollmann recollected of the 1965 West Berlin production of *Warten auf Godot*, which Beckett assisted: 'When Beckett came the sun was rising for us, everything became so clear and we were altogether very content, you know. Ohne Metaphysik—genau richtig ['Without metaphysics—just right']. The first night was a huge success'." (Furlani 2012: 52, following Knowlson & Knowlson 2006: 180)

ence. The work of art, the craft of the actor placed on stage change bareness into something special. We are seduced. We are engaged in Winnie's most prosaic activities like making her nails or brushing hair, clenching to them as if these activities were of life and death importance, as if they could help to live the theatre play (life) up to the end (death).

Knowlson and Knowlson recollect memories from Beckett's actor who were "searching and digging to get at the deeper sense" of their role until Beckett arrived to the rehearsal, saying: "But why? It's so simple. It's just a play". These apparently reductive and empty remarks helped the actors very much (Knowlson & Knowlson 2006: 180). But they were becoming insightful only if pronounced by Beckett, as well as only in Wittgenstein's mouth the words "don't think, look" had the imperative of a commandment. The same seduction can take place in reality – this is what learning to see means. And Wittgenstein changes into a *metteur en scène* when his remarks on reality grasp our imagination. A "woman standing on the jetty dressed in a trouser suit [...] [looking] magnificent", seen by Wittgenstein from a boat on the way back from Norway, is such an image perceived to the same extent by us, the spectators/readers of Wittgenstein, that Mr. Shower and Mrs. Shower "hand in hand". "What does it mean?", says Mr. Shower gaping at Winnie – "What's it meant to mean" to what Mrs. Shower replies with sober malice: "And you [...] what are you meant to mean?" (Beckett 2012b) There is no meaning meant by the picture. For Wittgenstein a picture was very often meant rather to silence inopportune questions than to ask some<sup>10</sup>. Only the meaning of words, the form of names, grammatical rules stop Winnie's narrative ("What is a *hog* exactly?"; "Shower – Shower – does the name mean anything – to you, Willie – evoke any reality, I mean [...] or Cooker, perhaps I should say Cooker"). This is the only legitimate form of interrogation – a sign of the fact that questions do come to an end. There must be an end. And this end – in a vast sense of reality, interpretation and justification – was fascinating both for Wittgenstein and Beckett. This sort of endgame – consciously making use of Beckett's title – consists in the ability of reaching the foundations of expression. "Giving grounds, however, justifying the evidence, comes to

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**10** In Wittgenstein's sister Hermine memoir about her brother an example of "communication in comparisons" where an image is meant to end a discussion is evoked. To Hermine's metaphor of using precision tools to open crates for describing Wittgenstein's decision to become a school teacher, Wittgenstein replied with a comparison, which as she admitted made her understand his state of mind and "silenced" her definitively. She was compared by Ludwig to someone who "is looking through a closed window and cannot explain to himself the strange movements of a passer-by. He doesn't know what kind of a storm is raging outside and that this person is perhaps only with great effort keeping himself on his feet". (Hermine Wittgenstein 1981: 5).

an end; – but the end is not certain propositions’ striking us immediately as true, i.e. it is not a kind of *seeing* on our part; it is our *acting*, which lies at the bottom of the language game” (OC 1974: § 204). In this late remark from *On Certainty* the evidence of the image is overshadowed by “acting”, that we might, for the sake of our argument, understand as theatre performance. The intended “actuality” happens inside the theatre<sup>11</sup>. The fundamental language game is built on a theatre performance – the only stage interpretation that we are capable of imagining. Words come from the stage and are received by the audience or, more exactly, by one particular participant of this audience, the one who *understands now because he already has understood*. He knows because he has already felt exactly the same experience that forces to express in such and such way. He has already climbed on this ladder (TLP 4.022, 4.3<sup>12</sup>). And if he has, then the ladder is no longer useful. “Do not come down the ladder, I for, I haf taken it away”(Beckett 2012a: n. p.). Explanation is no longer needed, or even more: any form of explanation destroys the effect.

The narrow rock where a mutilated human being has been led by a leash and is now observed as the place of final and fundamental decisions. Its two slopes correspond to life and death – as if this rock was one of those perfect suicidal locations. This is how we should listen to Winnie, not without reason having at her disposal a revolver. (“Remember Brownie [referring to the revolver U.I.S.], Willie? [Pause]. Remember how you used to keep on at me to take it away from you? Take it away, Winnie, take it away, before I put myself out of my misery!” [Beckett 2012a: n. p.]) The horizon of both Beckett and Wittgenstein’s reading should be seen as a horizon of suicidal deferral (the way we speak of “nuclear deferral”).

But let’s observe first the lighter slope corresponding to the choice of life. As we have already noticed Winnie resists falling into despair: the revolver is there (“conspicuous”), “contemplated” but than laid down into the bag. Winnie is rather thankful – she renders “great mercy” for the smallest things that happen in her life. And those smallest things receive from her the greatest unmeasured

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**11** I found in Furlani a confirmation of my hypothesis: “Beckett could draw clarifying philosophical confirmation of his aesthetic practice from Wittgenstein’s thought. Wittgenstein’s thinking recommends itself here because for Wittgenstein the theatre afforded exemplary demonstrations of the nature of selfhood and alterity, rule following, and interpretation” (Furlani 2012: Please add the page number!!!!1)

**12** “My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way” – writes Wittgenstein – “anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it).” (TLP 1961: 6.54)

welcome – she cannot live without admiring. “I feel well only when I am in a certain sense enthusiastic”, echoes Wittgenstein, adding at once:

Then again I fear the collapse of this enthusiasm [...]

I am often pained by the thought of how much the success or value of what I do depends on how I am disposed. More so than for a concert singer. Nothing is as it were stored up in me; nearly everything must be produced at the moment. That – I believe – is a very unusual sort of activity or life. (DB 2003: 19; 23)

In this context Wittgenstein might very well use the analogy to an actor, especially in Winnie’s intensive role. “The best state for me is the state of enthusiasm because it consumes the ridiculous thoughts at least partially & renders them harmless.” (DB 2003: 19)

Those ridiculous thoughts that potentially could be harmful suggest a suicidal nature. Only an amplified enthusiasm renders them harmless. Winnie, the character and the actress, achieves on stage a similar enthusiasm, she asks forgiveness for any sort of sadness that appears to her mind and immediately sends it off. “[C]an’t complain – mustn’t complain – so much to be thankful for – no pain – hardly any... no no” – such and similar expressions are repeated like an exhortation (Beckett 2012b). It is always “another happy day” for Winnie. Just before dying Wittgenstein has pronounced consonant words: “tell them I have had a wonderful life” (MAM 1958: 100). It wasn’t meant to be a private sentence; “tell them” was no less important than the content of the message. The exclamation of admiration has been for Wittgenstein the only right form of an ethical proposition, its only possible justification. To the proposition “you shall do this” the only possible referent is a proposition that makes an impression on the one who is addressed. It may be admiration or disgust – but these are the only justification “worthy of its name”

An ethical proposition states “you shall do this” or “that is good” but not “these people say that this is good”. But an ethical proposition is a personal act. Not a statement of fact. Like an exclamation of admiration. Just consider that the justification of an “ethical proposition” merely attempts to refer the proposition back to others that make an impression on you. If in the end you don’t have disgust for this & admiration for that, then there is no justification worthy of that name.) (DB 2003: 85)

This justification through admiring replaces looking for reasons or explanations. Admiration silences any sort of “but”, any sort of harmful thought. If you are amazed – you understand. You have already understood, you do not longer need the ladder to go down. And, furthermore, you can live on. On the contrary, if you are still waiting for another rung of the ladder (i.e. another argument) you can slip and fall down the other slope of the rock – the one that corresponds to a



lack of admiration (admiration, which appears not to be gradated) and implies a cold point of view. “Insofar as it is ever justifiable to look at something with coldness” – speculates Wittgenstein. Is it justifiable? Coldness is opposed to the warm interior of the audience from the metaphor mentioned earlier. When the performance corresponds to confession its reception within a cold point of view – the opposite of love – can have devastating consequences. On the top of the rocky summit where Wittgenstein has taken us the confessing subject chooses life or death. No matter how few and minor are the sins, at these heights even a perjury about one’s origin (Wittgenstein confessed several times about his Jewish origins) may lead to suicide. One’s ethical judgment about oneself is a question of impression, not expression. Which means that the feeling of being judged good or bad cannot be expressed, but is the result of impression – “I have a self only insofar as I feel reprobate”. The confessing subject in his absolute loneliness receives this impression from words he is pronouncing. Words look through the one who pronounces them; they are freed from the logic of justification, the one of pride and vanity, “beg your pardon, nodrap geb nodrap geb”<sup>13</sup> (Beckett 2012a: n. p.)

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**13** This passage is an extract of eight stages of Watt’s experiment with language that goes as follows: “So we began, after so long a time, to walk together again, and to talk, from time to time. As Watt walked, as now he talked, back to front. The following is an example of Watt’s manner, at this period:

*Day of most, night of part, Knott with now. Now till up, little seen so oh, little heard so oh. Night till morning from. Heard I this, saw I this then what. Thing quiet, dim. Ears, eyes, failing now also. Hush in, mist in, moved I so.*

[...] The utterance was as rapid, and as muffled as before. These were sounds that at first, though we walked face to face, were devoid of significance for me. Nor did Watt follow me. Pardon beg, he said, pardon, pardon beg. [...]

But soon I grew used to these sounds, and then I understood as well as before. So all went well until Watt began to invert, no longer the order of the sentences in the period, but that of words in the sentence together with that of the letters in the word. The following is an example of Watt’s manner at this period:

*Deed did taw? Tonk. Tog da taw? Tonk. Luf puk saw? Hap! Deen did tub? Ton sparp. To da tub? Ton wonk*

These were sounds that at first though we walked belly to belly were so much wind to me. Nor did Watt follow me.

Nodrap, geb, he said, nodrap, nodrap geb” (Beckett 2012a: n. p.) This passage ending with “beg your pardon” pronounced back to front is an extract of eight stages of Watt’s experiment with language. It is a perfect example of what Jakub Momro has fittingly called “logical semantics of madness” (Momro 2010). It has been associated by Marjorie Perloff to the period of Beckett engagement to the *résistance* in Paris 1940, where he has been assigned to the cell of a *réseau de renseignement* transmitting information about Axis troop movements and sending them to London. Beckett’s pseudonym was “Sam” (like the name of the protagonist cited below) (Perloff

Someone who in this way opens his heart to God in remorseful confession opens it for others too. He thereby loses his dignity as someone special and so becomes like a child. That means without office, dignity & aloofness from others. You can open yourself to others only out of a particular kind of love. Which acknowledges as it were that we are all wicked children. (VB 1980: 52e)

Winnie seems such a child, lacking selfhood, but perhaps only in the eyes of someone who sitting in the warm auditorium receives her not from distance, but with empathy or love. Wittgenstein was always trying “to be loved & not admired” (VB 1980: 44e), since admiration was for him the source of vanity – his major temptation. In the warm audience of the theatre, in the reading room of the Wittgenstein’s residence, in front of a lunatic who imposes on us his confession, who cannot stop speaking making us embarrassed, we experience confession in its pure state. Bernhard said that words are judging us. But within the anti-essentialist approach those words can no longer be arguments, words of honor, symbols, but only indistinct sounds released from the mastery of the speaking subject. Wittgenstein never referred to them with coldness because coldness impedes further living (“There is far too little self...”). The confessing subject has no self, or has a self only feeling reprobate and loved all the same – not forgiven, not justified but caught within a warm point of view. Between the stage and the theatre auditorium, a mutual observation is taking place. It is only through words performed on scene, in a condition of being masked but at the same exposed that words look at us, words in which eyes I have become a problem for myself (paraphrasing Saint Augustine).

God may say to me: ‘I am judging you out of your own mouth. Your have shuddered with disgust at your own actions when you have seen them in other people’ (VB 1980: 99e).

The theatre turns into a laboratory where within a condition of mutilation of the human body “concepts of such thing as dignity” can be redefined. Inside a body buried up to the head, exposed to the burning sun – a fact that does not mean anything, that is not meant to mean – the dignity is preserved only inside the pronounced words: “tell them I have had a wonderful life”. Words at last saved from vanity, from a misunderstood human dignity, become themselves the agent of salvation.

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1996: 123). The informative system consisted in a cut-out system in which encoding was of crucial importance. In such circumstances the succession/sequence of words in a sentence was of crucial importance “someone’s survival may literally hang on the thread of what X tells Y, who in turn tells Z” writes Perloff (Perloff 1996:127).

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